

# Introduction

Visit St. Lucie is St. Lucie County's official tourism marketing organization. The Division of Tourism office is structured under local county government and operates under the policies and procedures adopted by the St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners.

The Tourism Division is responsible for the development, planning and implementation of all aspects of tourism-related work in coordination with the County and the Tourist Development Council's (TDC) goals and objectives. The division develops, plans, organizes, and oversees tourism marketing programs; develops and administers marketing strategy and programs; conducts market research; promotes County tourism assets, programs, events, and resources and monitors and maintains the tourism budget.

The division is also focused on advancing County and community tourism advocacy and support, actively participating in membership events, maintaining communication and effective relationships with the media, public officials, partner municipalities, the local and state hospitality industry and the general public.

This publication will provide our partners, stakeholders, and the general public an overview of St. Lucie County's tourist development initiatives, programs, and plans in an easy-to-read format.

This publication is also online at www.stlucieco.gov.



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# **Executive Summary**



# Background

# The Destination

St. Lucie is home to the historic city of Fort Pierce, the vibrant city of Port St. Lucie & beautiful beaches of Hutchinson Island and is located on the Atlantic Ocean along the east coast of Florida, 120 miles southeast of Orlando and 115 miles north of Miami with direct access from Florida's Turnpike, Interstate 95 and State Road 70. The area offers an array of visitor activities including 21 miles of uncrowded, natural beaches, championship golf, excellent outdoor and nature adventures, a thriving arts and cultural scene, world class fishing and dozens of unique attractions. A variety of accommodations such as hotels, motels, bed & breakfasts, an allinclusive resort, and private vacation rentals are available.

As of 2018, the number of commercial properties (hotels, motels, bed & breakfast, RV parks, etc.) was approximately 48 with an estimated 4,800 units available for rent. Additionally, the destination's private vacation rental inventory (i.e. rentals listed on AirBnB, VRBO, etc.) continues to grow year over year fluctuating between 1,100 and 1,600 listings depending on availability and seasonality.

# **Visit St. Lucie Brand Positioning Statement**

For visitors who appreciate the natural resources and authentic experience of a slower-paced, south Florida coastal destination that immerses them in an abundance of outdoor, sports, and water-based activities, a vibrant local arts  $\bar{a}$  culture scene creating a perfect balance of vibrancy  $\bar{a}$  playfulness, yet relaxation and calmness.

# The Board of County Commissioners, The Tourist Development Council and Staff

The St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) provides the support and direction needed to implement the Tourism Division's annual plans. As directed by Florida Statute 125.0104, any county levying and imposing a tourist development tax must appoint an advisory council known as the Tourist Development Council (TDC). The St. Lucie County TDC is composed of nine members who are appointed by the BOCC and includes three elected officials, three representatives from accommodations collecting the tourist tax and three representatives from tourismrelated industries. The TDC makes recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners on matters relating to the use of the tourist development tax funds.

The Tourism Division staff consists of three team members who direct and implement the day-to-day activities of all tourism-related work.

### This includes the:

- Director of Tourism & Marketing
- Marketing & Public Relations Coordinator
- Content & Digital Marketing Specialist

Active and productive partnerships with local and state tourism entities are critical to the success of achieving the goals and objectives of Visit St. Lucie's annual plan. These partners include local lodging and tourismrelated businesses, the City of Port St. Lucie, the City of Fort Pierce, the St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce, the St. Lucie County Economic Development Council, the Treasure Coast Sports Commission, Indian River County Tourism, Martin County Tourism, the St. Lucie County Hotel & Lodging Association, the New York Mets, the Florida Association of Destination Marketing Organizations and VISIT FLORIDA.













# **Mission Statement**

To market St. Lucie County and its cities as a destination and to promote activities that will generate new or repeat visitors, thereby creating a positive economic impact for St. Lucie County.



ST. LUCIE COUNTY





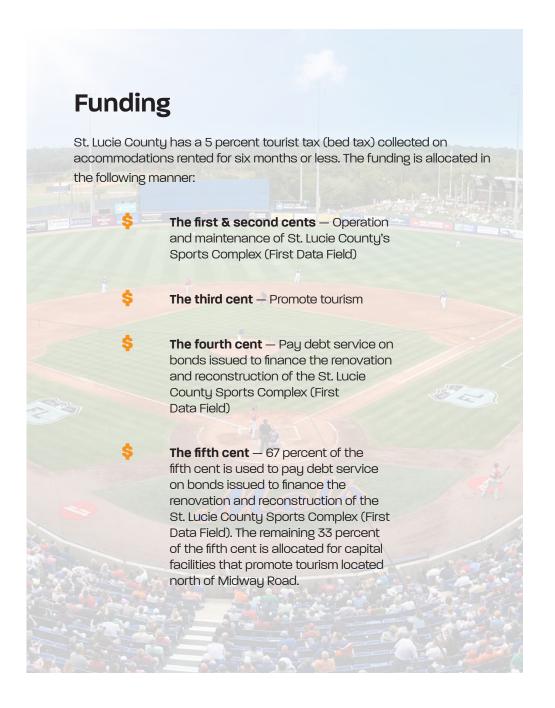




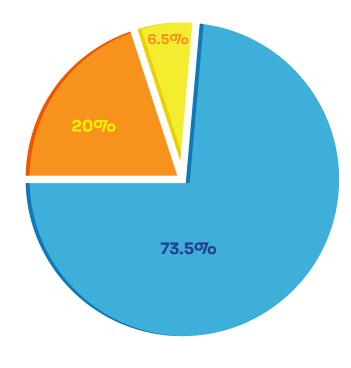








# Percentage Of Tourist Development Tax Revenue Allocated

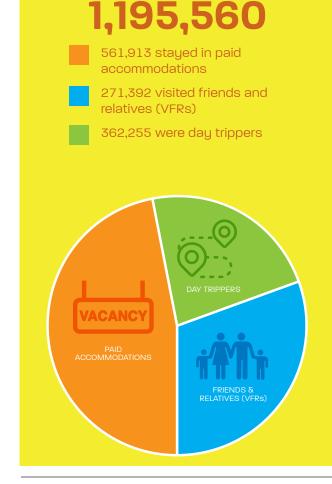


- SLC Sports Complex First Data Field
- Promote Tourism
- Capital facilities that promote tourism north of Midway Road



# 2017 Visitor Tracking & Economic Impact Study

In 2017, the Tourism Division commissioned Downs & St. Germain Research to conduct a year-long visitor tracking and economic impact study to document both the economic impact of visitors to St. Lucie and to develop profiles of visitors to St. Lucie. The data captured during the study has provided a benchmark for future studies and can also serve as a source of information for making strategic policy and tourism marketing decisions.



**Total Number of Visitors** 

# Methodology

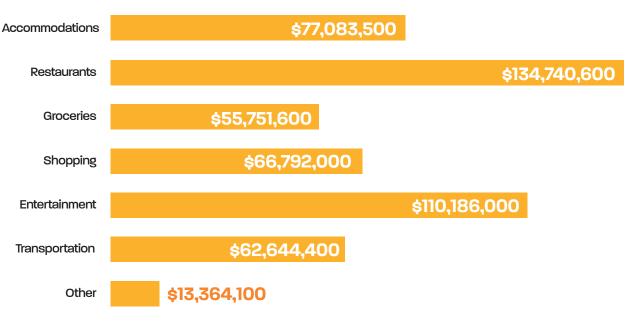
- Internet survey with hotel visitors & inperson interviews (intercepts) in public areas and at special events in St. Lucie
- Sample size collected 3,460 completed interviews
- Target individuals visitors to St. Lucie
- Data collection October 2016 through September 2017





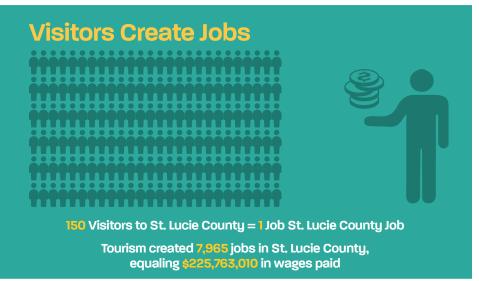
# **Direct Spending**

# \$520,562,200



# The St. Lucie County TDC is directly responsible for \$498.32 in visitor spending for every \$1 spent on marketing activities. 1 Source: Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR), the research arm of the Florida Legislative

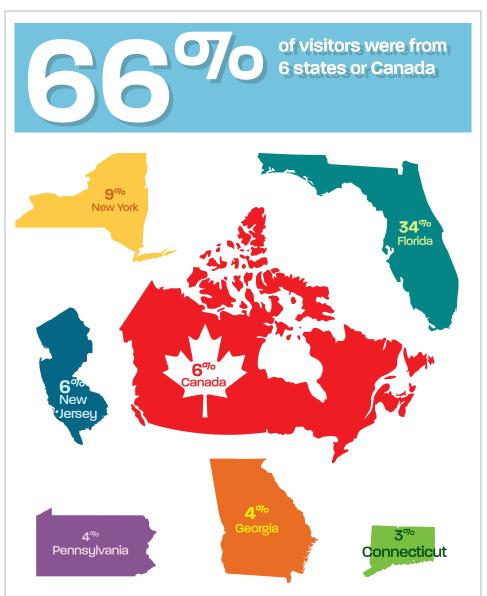


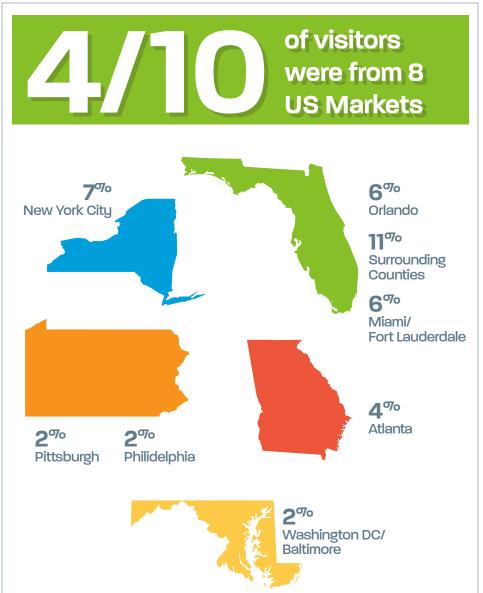


# Research & Findings

### **Visitor Profile**

In 2017, the Tourism Office commissioned Downs & St. Germain Research to conduct a year-long visitor tracking and economic impact study to document both the economic impact of visitors to St. Lucie and to develop profiles of visitors to St. Lucie. The data captured during the study has provided a benchmark for future studies and can also serve as a source of information for making strategic policy and tourism marketing decisions.



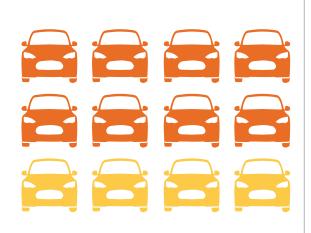


# **Transportation**

# **Visitor Satisfaction**

66°7°

of visitors travel by car



9.2

Visitors gave St. Lucie a rating of 9.2<sup>1</sup> as a place to vacation<sup>2</sup>



110=Excellent; 1=Poor.

<sup>2</sup>1% of visitors who gave St. Lucie County a rating of 6 or below gave the following suggestions for improvement: 1. More to do during the day; 2. More/better restaurants; 3. Less expensive, 4. More to do at night.

**25**%

of visitors travel by air



94%

of visitors stated they would return to St. Lucie



# **Short Trip Planning Cycle**

planned their trip 1 to 3 weeks in advance

St. Lucie County should develop social media efforts that are tied to key travel dates such as holidays and dates of key events in St. Lucie County or neighboring counties.

Higher percentage of families visit in April-June quarter.

With short planning cycles  $\delta$  high percentage of visitors who drive, there is an opportunity to create a social media based "family road trip campaign" for April-June.

of visitors considered visiting somewhere other than St. Lucie County

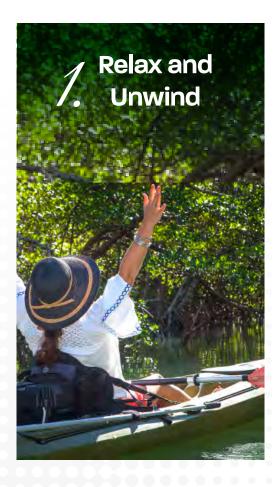
Only 14% of visitors considered visiting somewhere other than St. Lucie County – when they choose other destinations, visitors to St. Lucie County choose another beach area that is close geographically.

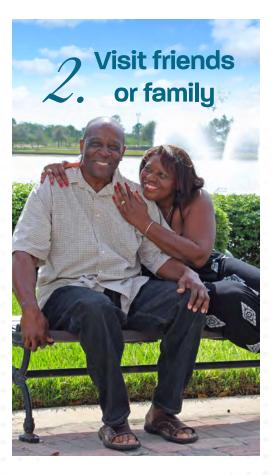
There are opportunities to partner with Jensen Beach and Vero Beach to use combined marketing dollars for positioning these areas as alternatives to West Palm Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, & Miami.





# **Top 3 Reasons for Visiting**









# Friends and Family

#1 source for planning trips to St. Lucie County and #2 reason for visiting St. Lucie County.

Develop a social media campaign for locals highlighting St. Lucie County to increase civic pride and encourage others (specifically friends and family) to visit the area.







# 2018 / 2019 Annual Marketing Plan

The mission of the St. Lucie County Tourism Division is to market St. Lucie County and its cities as a destination and to promote activities that will generate new or repeat visitors, thereby creating a positive economic impact for St. Lucie County.

This year's marketing approach will have a strong focus in leveraging our partnerships, and utilizing social media marketing and public relations activities in order to maximize our budget to its fullest extent. The marketing and promotions budget has been reduced by 15% compared to the year prior (FY 2018).

# Goals

### Increase brand awareness of Visit St. Lucie

Fort Pierce, Port St. Lucie & Hutchinson Island as a destination for visitors who appreciate natural resources and the authentic experience of a slower-paced, south Florida coastal destination with an abundance of outdoor, sporting, and water-based activities and a vibrant, local arts and culture scene.

### Maintain and/or increase visitor satisfaction rating

In 2017, the Visit St. Lucie's visitor tracking study revealed that St. Lucie had a 9.2 visitor satisfaction rating with 10 being excellent and 1 being poor. This data creates a benchmark for measurement for future studies (if budget allows).

### **Enhance visitor services**

- Identify funding sources and issue Request for Proposal to purchase visitor information kiosk hardware and software to place in visitor centers and other high traffic locations throughout the County.
- Partner with the St. Lucie County Tax Collector's office to distribute visitor information and materials to vacation rental owners.
- Fulfill visitor information requests in a timely manner.
- Distribute visitor information materials at special events that attract out-of-town visitors, thereby increasing awareness of tourism-related businesses and economic impact of visitation.

### Create and implement cooperative marketing opportunities

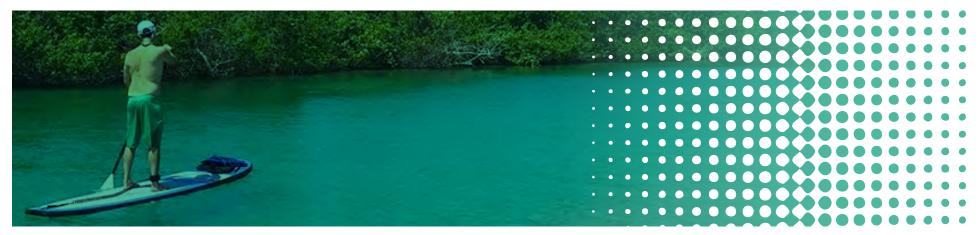
Marketing programs will be customized for industry partners to increase exposure and maximize limited budgets.

### Support and grow meetings and conference tourism segments

Work with meeting venue partners such as the Port St. Lucie Civic Center, Club Med Sandpiper, PGA Village, and the Havert L. Fenn Center.

### **Explore and invest in emerging markets**

Destination awareness campaigns will be implemented with regional tourism partners and VISIT FLORIDA.



# **Targets**

The results of our 2017 Visitor Tracking study revealed that we have established visitation from Florida in-state markets such as Orlando and Miami, as well as New York, New Jersey and Canada.

Visitor origins and visitor type shifted when looking at the data from the study. Not surprisingly, instate markets remained the highest visitor origin throughout the year and the seasonal visitation trends were confirmed. Visitors from the North/Northeast states such as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Canada were highest during January through March. However, the percentage of in-state visitors was lowest during this time. Additionally, in-state visitation was highest during the remaining months running April through December.

Visit St. Lucie will continue its brand awareness in the established markets and will also explore brand awareness opportunities in emerging markets such as Atlanta & Pittsburgh. These efforts will be done in partnership with VISIT FLORIDA and our regional tourism partners.

Top Origin States	Oct-Dec 2016	Jan-Mar 2017	Apr-June 2017	July-Sept 2017
Florida	437o	2170	39%	44%
New York	7 <b>7</b> 0	11%	8 <b>7</b> 0	6 <b>%</b>
New Jersey	5 <b>%</b>	870	6 <b>%</b>	<b>6</b> %
Pennsylvania	3 <b>7</b> 0	4 <b>7</b> 0	3 <b>%</b> o	3%
Georgia	47o	3 <b>7</b> / <sub>0</sub>	47o	490
Connecticut	49o	5 <b>%</b> o	3 <b>%</b>	2%
Canada	6 <b>%</b>	870	5 <b>%</b>	2%

Top Origin Markets	Oct-Dec 2016	Jan-Mar 2017	Apr-June 2017	July-Sept 2017
Surrounding Counties	25%	870	870	870
New York City	5%	9%	<b>6</b> %	6%
Orlando	<b>3</b> 70	47o	10%	870
Miami-Ft. Lauderdale	6%	37o	970	7 <b>7</b> 0
Atlanta	<b>3</b> 70	2 <b>7</b> 0	4 <b>7</b> 0	470
Philadelphia	270	<b>2</b> 70	1970	3%
Pittsburgh	170	3 <b>7</b> 0	370	2%
Washington DC-Baltimore	<b>37</b> 0	37o	2%	270

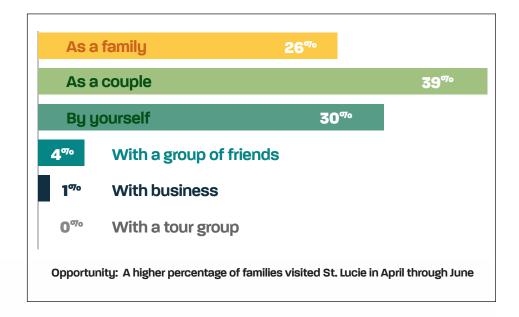


# **Demographics**

The 2017 Visitor Tracking and Economic Impact Study revealed that the typical visitor to St. Lucie is **53 years old, caucasian, and has a median household income of \$72,700.** The typical visitor is female, but just slightly with females at 52% and males at 48%.

# Psychographic / Behavioral

- ▶ The typical visitor traveled in a party composed of 2.9 people
- 47% of visitors traveled with at least one person under the age of 20 in their travel party
- ▶ 65% of visitors traveled as a couple or a family





# **Visitor Activities**



# 2018 / 2019 Annual Marketing Plan

# **Marketing Strategies**

### Make data-driven decisions

Decisions justified with visitor research, marketing insights and other secondary research sources ensures all marketing and messaging is targeted, relevant and effective.

### Focus on desination branding

Utilize existing "Away" creative campaign for destination brand awareness marketing efforts. Niche marketing efforts may utilize different messaging to appeal to the audience, while still maintaining the destination's brand integrity.

### Increase public relations efforts

With a reduced budget, the St. Lucie Tourism office is gearing up to increase its public relations efforts in 2019 to generate earned media, develop travel media and influencer relationships and ultimately increase the destination's awareness through strategic media relations.

### **Invest in more digital**

Lower direct expenses related to printed marketing materials and create and curate more digital materials through user generated content, video production and sharing assets with partners that can be utilized for targeted digital content distribution.

# **Key Performance Metrics**

Increase tourist development tax revenues by 3%

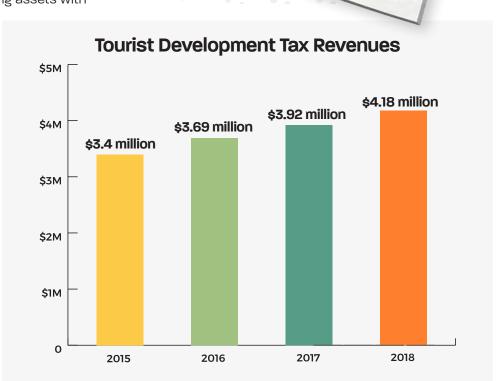
Increase visitors by 3%

Increase website visits and social media engagement

Monitor conversions/leads generated

- Email sign ups
- Visitor information requests
- Visits to lodging partners page and/or click throughs to lodging partners\*

\*Referral web traffic data to lodging partners must be provided by participating lodging partners





# Trends in the Marketplace



### Print is not dead

Nearly 25,000 printed St. Lucie Travel Guides were distributed in 2018.



# 

# Mobile usage continues to increase

Web visits using a mobile device has increased 16% since 2017.



### Storytelling is still hot

Every destination has a story to tell and with a "treasure trove" of unique attractions, a rich history and a long list of national accolades, the St. Lucie Tourism Division will be distributing these stories to the right audience at the right time.





### Online reviews matter

The St. Lucie Tourism Division, with the help of its partners, will make every effort to audit and monitor online reviews about the destination and provide crisis control on the destination's image and address any misperceptions as they arise.

Non-traditional overnight accommodations (private vacation rentals) industry continues to substantially grow (AirBnB, Homeaway, VRBO, etc.).

### Claim our niche

Similar to our "stories to tell," Visit St. Lucie can claim its niche of being the:

- Gem of the Treasure Coast
- The fishing capital of Florida
- Where the wild peacocks roam the streets
- Home of the New York Mets spring training for over 30 years
- One of Florida's safest cities
- Where South Florida Flavor Meets Small Town Charm
- And more!

### Voice search is growing

Think Alexa, Google & Siri -90% of people will use it by 2023 and the St. Lucie Tourism Division will ensure that its search engine optimization integrates voice search into its program.

# Vacation Rental Industry Trends in St. Lucie

	Oct 1, 2016	Oct 1, 2017	Oct 1, 2018
AirBnB	484	847	1,421
Homeaway	400	584	679
TripAdvisor VR	294	382	471
VRBO	572	821	984
Total	1,750	2,634	3,555

Source: AlltheRooms, 2018 – based on the total sum of the listing platforms captured on October 1 of each year. Some listings may be duplicates skewing the total amount.

# **Media Strategy**



Develop an integrated **multi-media plan** to reach all demographics in established and emerging markets.

Utilize **low cost, highly targeted digital media** in emerging and niche markets to increase destination awareness and measure interest and engagement.

Place and distribute **timely media buys** and efforts based on seasonality, propensity to travel, holidays & during defined periods of need.

Stay up-to-date on **new media** and trends in the marketplace by participating in industry webinars, conferences and maintaining active role in industry associations

# **Paid Media**

### Print - general awareness, branding

- VISIT FLORIDA magazine
- Brand USA
- Newspaper inserts in key feeder markets
- ▶ Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Fishing Regulations Guide

### **Digital**

- Email create opportunities for partner participation, target niche audiences by creating email segmentation programs, include relevant and timely content and improve performance results
- Social media launch paid social media campaigns to build awareness, generate web traffic, increase engagement and inspire travel to St. Lucie
- Search Engine Optimization and Search Engine Marketing (SEO & SEM) continue investment in our SEO our program to ensure that Visit St. Lucie is consistently focused on growing its online presence through organic search engine results that will improve rankings, drive web traffic, and increase awareness among all search engine platforms. Continue our investment in our SEM program to promote VisitStLucie.com in search engine results pages through paid advertising

### Television

 Continue in-state awareness campaign touting Fort Pierce as a premier fishing destination

### **Out of Home**

 Research and invest in outdoor advertising and other non-traditional outdoor advertising opportunities in feeder and emerging markets

### Campaigns planned for 2019

- Citi Field / Mets In-Stadium St. Lucie, Where the Season Never Ends (June September)
- Summer Fishing (May July)
- ▶ General Awareness and branding (year round)
- Share Your St. Lucie (June October)
- ▶ Post Red Tide contingent if awarded the VISIT FLORIDA marketing grant (TBD)
- Treasure Coast Brand Awareness (May July)



Search engine marketing efforts resulted in a 32% increase in website sessions, and a click-through rate of 4.68% year over year.

\*Industry average is 2.18%

6 TOO INCREASE

Search engine optimization efforts generated a 67% increase in organic web traffic year over year.

# **Content Strategy**

- ▶ Create content that encourages engagement
- Continue implementing user generated content into marketing channels and encourage locals and visitors to use established hashtags such as #VisitStLucie #LovethePort & #LovetheFort
- Curate and create more video, photos and request partners to share their assets
- > Schedule strategic Facebook Live broadcasts

	October	November	Decemeber	
5	Weeke	end Getaways/Week	day Hotel Offers	
V	Couples			
	Fall Festivals	Holiday Planning	Winter Bragging	

0	January	February	March	April
5	Winter Bragging		Outdoors/Eco	
ŭ	Romantic Travel		Events	Family Vacations
	Black History Month			

0	May	June	July	Aug/Sep
<b>6</b>	Family Vacations			Fall Festivals
N				



### **Public Relations**

- Respond to editorial leads received from VISIT FLORIDA and other partners
- Update press kit and customize for niche markets and efforts
- Host familiarization (FAM) tours & press trips
  - Germany (with VISIT FLORIDA)
  - Canada (with VISIT FLORIDA)
  - ▶ Treasure Wine & Ale Trail (with Indian River Tourism)
  - ▶ Arts & Culture
  - Meeting Planners (with Club Med & PSL Civic Center)
- Identify influencers
- Integrate activation events during key campaigns

## Sales & Outreach

Attend Travel Shows to maintain and build awareness in established and emerging markets

- Atlanta
- Montreal
- Toronto
- New York
- Boston
- Pittsburgh
- Snowbird Extravaganza

### Activations

- Atlanta
- NY Mets / Citi Field

# 2018/2019 Editorial Calendar

Due	Publish	Topic
October	November	TC Wine and Ale Trail Festival
November	December	Why Your Family Should come to St. Lucie for the Holidays, 10 Winter Wonders in St. Lucie
January	January	Celebrate Love at Club Med Sandpiper, Black History Month/African American Heritage
February	February	Staycations - Why leave town when everything you need is here?, Mets Spring Training
February	March	Eco-tours - hiking, preserves, bird watching
April	April	Top 5 Animal Activities You AND Your Kids will Love
May	May	Boating Season is Upon Us - Get yours custom made right here in St. Lucie!
June	June	Summer Fun for the Whole Family
July	July	21 Miles of Unspolied Beaches- Oh My!
Auguse	August	Top 10 Things to Do in St. Lucie
September	September	Craft Beer - Drink Local!

# 2018 / 2019 Annual Marketing Plan



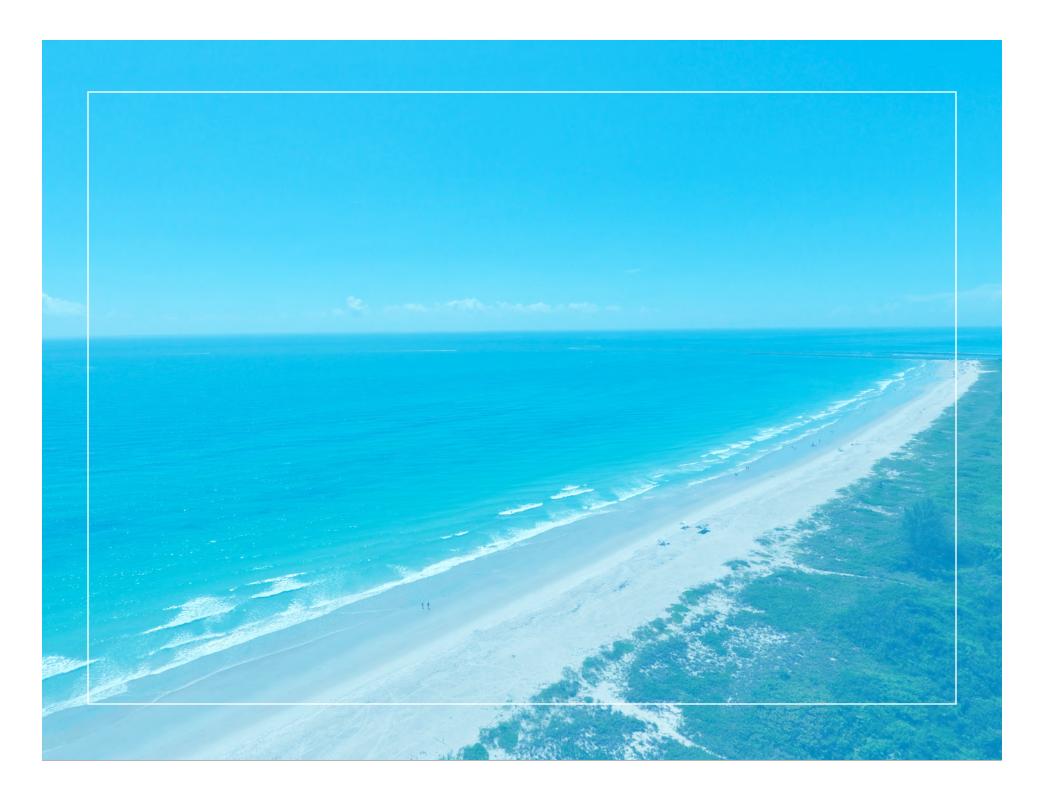
### **Events**

Leverage new and existing special "niche market" events to reach visitors while they are in the destination and engage them for potential repeat visitation

- Annual Skeeter Skoot non-traditional sporting event (50k Ultra Run) that showcases our natural beauty & resources
- Southern Kingfish Association / Fishing Frenzy festival week
- Activation at New York Mets Spring Training Home games
  - Create promotions with partners
  - ▶ Promote Top Ten Things to Do in PSL, FP & St. Lucie overall
- Work with St. Lucie Cultural Alliance on creating an official "cultural" event
- Treasure Coast Tourism Showcase
- Procession of the Species
- ► Treasure Coast Wine & Ale Trail Festival

# **Printed Marketing Materials**

- 2019 Travel Guide
- 2019 Travel Map
- > 2019 Nature Guide
- Treasure Coast Brochure
- ► Treasure Coast Wine & Ale Trail Rack Card/Map

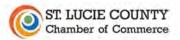


# **Grow Key Partnerships**



### Treasure Coast Sports Commission (TCSC)

Continue to fund and partner with the TCSC to enhance programming and events that result in sanctioned signature events, growing the diversity of events that introduce the destination and generate repeat visitors.



### St. Lucie County Chamber of Commerce

Continue active leadership role with the Chamber's Tourism Enhancement Team on educating and advocating on behalf of the tourism business industry and enhancing the visitor experience by focusing on visitor information services, events and activities.



### Indian River & Martin County Tourism

Create and market a regional Treasure Coast brand to leverage budget with partners and increase general awareness in shared emerging markets.



### City of Port St. Lucie & City of Fort Pierce

Engage with municipalities' elected officials and staff on Visit St. Lucie tourism marketing efforts, research and campaigns and integrate relevant city events, developments and activities into overall tourism marketing messaging.



VISITFLORIDA

### **VISIT FLORIDA**

Continue to invest in partner programs, redeem partner benefits, serve on organization committees and participate in continuing education programs and webinars.



# St. Lucie Economic Development Council

Collaborate on hotel development opportunities and continue to share tourism economic impact data with potential investors.



### St. Lucie Cultural Alliance (SLCA)

Provide ongoing support and collaboration to help establish SLCA's goal to build awareness of St. Lucie as a cultural destination.





# **Develop an Industry Relations Program**

The Industry Relations Program aims to unify Visit St. Lucie's travel industry. Action items include:

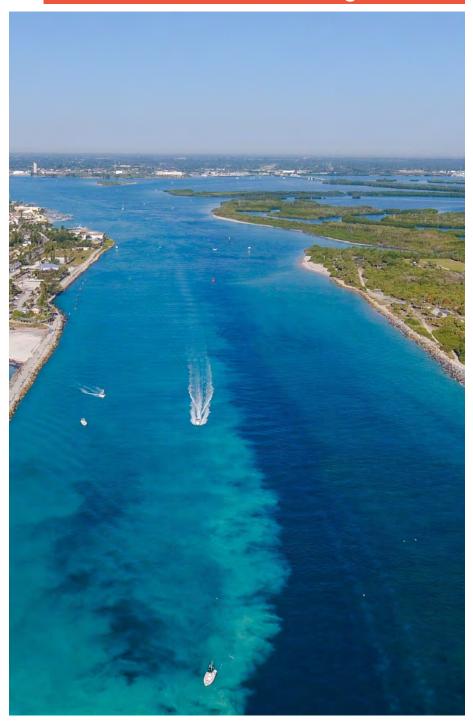
- Create and build awareness of marketing co-ops available to industry partners
- Continue tourism advocacy by engaging and educating the tourism industry and local community on the value of tourism in St. Lucie

# **Expand Travel Trade Marketing Opportunities**

- Explore the growth of the meetings  $\delta$  conferences tourism segment with key partners
- Research opportunities to market and generate awareness of Visit St. Lucie through travel agents and tour operators

# Explore Opportunities between Tourism & Economic Development

- Continue to participate and contribute to airport and seaport development discussions
- Monitor new hotel development activity and private vacation rental industry growth (i.e. AirBnB, VRBO, etc.)
- Follow development of Southern Grove corridor and identify synergies for tourism and economic development messaging



# 2018 / 2019 Strategic Initiatives



# **Stay Prepared and Informed**

- Consistently update, tweak and evolve crisis communication plans
- Seek out best practices and effective methods to address issues facing the tourism industry
- Stay active in local, state and national associations, organizations and agencies for access to information and resources
- Work with St. Lucie County Legislative Affairs Director, local and state elected officials and partner organizations to monitor legislative issues that could impact the tourism industry

# **Focus on Improving the Visitor Experience**

- From their first visit to VisitStLucie.com to their experience in the local Visitor Information Center, ensure that visitors are able to access the inspiration and information they need
- Research and propose improvements to digitize the visitor experience at visitor touchpoints in St. Lucie such as the Seven Gables Visitor Center, hotels and other key points of interest
- Expand outreach at popular events that draw visitors outside the area (i.e. Mets Spring Training Games, Downtown Fort Pierce Farmers Market, Treasure Coast Beer Festival, etc.) to promote all the assets St. Lucie has to offer
- Administer and manage the TDC Capital Grant program

